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June 26, 2006

Ms. Lynda D. Curtis  
Executive Director  
Bellevue Hospital Center  
462 First Avenue, Mezz. 8  
New York, NY 10016

Re: The Bellevue Hospital Sobriety Garden

Dear Ms. Curtis:

I am writing you to express my profound disappointment in Bellevue Hospital's plans to turn the Chemical Dependency Program's Sobriety Garden into a parking lot, in order to accommodate parking spaces that will be lost due to the construction of the East River Science Park.

I understand that under Bellevue's plans, a parking lot would replace roughly two thirds of the Garden, leaving the Garden with a space that is not particularly good for gardening. While this land currently falls within the garden, most of this land is not arable in part due to large diesel tanks located directly underneath the Garden and in part because the remaining land happens to be relatively unfertile. While I have been informed that Bellevue has offered the director of the program, Dr. Annatina Miescher, alternative locations in the front of the Hospital, these proposed areas are unacceptable to the needs of the patients and the garden. One of the proposed areas, the park space along First Avenue, has little access to sunlight and is currently being used by homeless individuals as a sleeping area. Moreover, not only is this land significantly smaller than the current Sobriety Garden, but the proposed space lacks privacy, a necessary and valued aspect of horticultural therapy. The second piece of land offered by Bellevue, also along First Avenue and significantly smaller than the present Garden, does not mitigate the loss of the Garden and is basically a mound of unfertile dirt and concrete.

In light of Bellevue Hospital's valued reputation as an innovative leader in addressing the medical needs of New York City's individuals with mental health illnesses, I am both shocked and surprised at the Hospital's cavalier attitude toward the patients whose treatment depends on the Garden. This Garden has played an instrumental role in healing countless individuals with

chemical dependency problems over the past 17 years. Not only does this Garden provide horticultural therapy to patients at Bellevue, but it has served as a gallery for patients to display artwork, as an open space for patients, visitors and staff to congregate and relax, as well as a beautiful welcoming oasis of fresh fruit, vegetables and flora.

I am also troubled by Bellevue's apparent lack of outreach to the community and elected officials in making this decision. Better communication at an earlier point in time could have ameliorated the problem by allowing the parties to craft a better solution while avoiding destruction of the Garden in the middle of a growing season. This top down non-inclusive approach leads to bad decision-making and poor relations with both patients and the community. Frankly, it is terrible community-based planning to involve the patients, greater community and elected officials at such a late point in the process.

On so many levels, this current plan to eliminate space in the Sobriety Garden to add a total of 64 parking spaces is unacceptable. I strongly urge you to find alternative space for the cars in the surrounding area to accommodate the loss of parking spaces. I am more than happy to work with Bellevue Hospital, the Health and Hospitals Corporation and the community to ensure that we find a solution that works for the Hospital, the patients and the community and preserves the Sobriety Garden. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,



**CAROLYN B. MALONEY**

Member of Congress

CBM/lk

cc: Health and Hospitals Corporation  
New York City Economic Development Corporation  
State Senator Liz Krueger  
State Senator Tom Duane  
Assemblymember Sylvia Friedman  
Borough President Scott Stringer  
City Councilmember Dan Garodnick  
Community Board 6  
Friends of Bellevue Hospital Sobriety Garden